



(U) Before and After: Headed for Baghdad

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(C) When we heard that the NSA/CSS Representative Iraq (NCR Iraq) position was due for a changeover, we got an idea. Why not interview the future NCR before he deploys, and then again when he comes back? We hope that this "before and after" approach will give a sense of what surprises lay in store for him in Iraq. The future NCR, Mark Cronin, agreed to be interviewed, and what follows is the "before" half of the tale:

(C) The NCR Iraq position rotates every 90 to 120 days. On 25 May, Mark Cronin will leave to replace [REDACTED] in this position. Mark was asked to volunteer, but he describes this as a legitimate request, i.e., one that he could accept or decline.

(C) After discussing the situation with his wife [REDACTED] he decided that going to Baghdad was the right thing to do. He'll be there until early September, over the very critical summer months.

(S//SI) During Mark's tenure as NCR Iraq, U.S. government representation will transition from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the State Department. The governmental power will transfer to an interim Iraqi government. The primary U.S. official in the country will be Ambassador Negroponte, who until now has served as the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. Mark has already been in contact with the NSA Representative to the U.S.-UN staff, [REDACTED], and so he has an idea of the kind of SIGINT support that the Ambassador will want.

(C) What is the role of the NCR Iraq? According to Mark, the job is largely about managing expectations, so that U.S. officials will have a good idea of what NSA can do for them. He will lead the 100+ NSA'ers working in Iraq (their health and safety is of prime concern) and he will support NCR CENTCOM (Greg Smithberger) to keep him fully aware of what's going on in-country. So that he'll be able to "hit the ground running," [REDACTED] has been including Mark on relevant e-mail exchanges and has already passed on background information on the important issues. Once in Iraq, Mark will work closely with the Iraq Issue Management Team at Fort Meade.

(U//FOUO) For administrative matters, Mark has benefited from a "terrific" deployment checklist, that covers everything from travel medicine (6 shots required) to needed gear (gas masks) to weapons training. The entire deployment process takes more than a month. Living conditions in Baghdad will be demanding (at least compared to those in Maryland - not compared to what others in Iraq are experiencing!). He will share a trailer with three other Americans near the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) facilities, and will work from about 0630-2200, seven days a week. He will be accompanied by four security guards at all times when traveling, and will ride in an armored SUV.

(U//FOUO) Mark believes that keeping up with change will be the major challenge he will face during his TDY-- but that this will be an experience he'll remember for the rest of his life.

(U//FOUO) Watch for the "after" article when Mark Cronin returns to the Fort in the fall!

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